

JANUARY 21, 1976

ANNIVERSARY OF SUPREME COURT ABORTION DECISION

ANNCR:

TODAY (THIS WEEK) (JANUARY 22) MARKS THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF A U.S. SUPREME COURT DECISION THAT STILL IS CAUSING CONTROVERSY. THE HIGH COURT MADE ABORTION LEGAL. LINDA CASHDAN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

THE NATIONAL ABORTION RIGHTS LEAGUE RALLIED ON CAPITOL HILL LAST WEEK. THE ANTI-ABORTION FORCES ARE POLITICKING ON CAPITOL HILL THIS WEEK. IT IS A RATHER PECULIAR WAY OF CELEBRATING THE ANNIVERSARY OF A FINAL EDICT, BUT IT IS THE WAY THE ABORTION DECISION HAS BEEN CELEBRATED FOR THREE YEARS NOW, AND IT IS BECOMING A TRADITION. MOST SUPREME COURT PRONOUNCEMENTS ARE CONSIDERED THE LAST WORD ON THE SUBJECT. BUT THE NINETEEN SEVENTY-THREE DECISION ON ABORTION TRIGGERED A NATIONAL DEBATE THAT HAS BEEN ESCALATING EVER SINCE. THE ANTI-ABORTION FORCES HAVE BEEN PRESSING FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT WHICH WOULD OVERRULE THE SUPREME COURT DECISION. THEY ALSO HAVE BEEN WORKING WITHIN CONGRESS AND IN STATE LEGISLATURES TO DEVELOP LEGAL RESTRICTIONS TO THE SUPREME COURT RULING. THE PRO-ABORTION FORCES HAVE BEEN FIGHTING THEM ON EACH ATTEMPT. IN ALL, SOME EIGHTY-SIX BILLS RELATING TO ABORTION HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED IN CONGRESS OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS. NONE HAS PASSED. BUT THE NUMBERS OF PASSIONATE SPOKESMEN ON BOTH SIDES HAVE INCREASED DRASTICALLY. IN AN UNPRECEDENTED POLITICAL MOVE, THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS, AT THEIR ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN NOVEMBER, ENACTED A PRO-LIFE PLAN CALLING UPON "EVERY AMERICAN CATHOLIC" TO ENTER THE BATTLE

AGAINST LEGALIZED ABORTION. ON THE OTHER SIDE, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT SIXTY DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS IN WASHINGTON ARE ACTIVELY CAMPAIGNING IN SUPPORT OF THE SUPREME COURT DECISION. AND RECENT POLLS EVALUATING VOTERS' ATTITUDES ON THE SUBJECT INDICATE THAT ABORTION WILL PROBABLY BE AN ISSUE IN THIS YEAR'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

THAT IN ITSELF IS A SHARP BREAK FROM TRADITION. THROUGHOUT AMERICAN HISTORY -- UNTIL 1973 -- ABORTION WAS NOT ONLY AN ILLEGAL ACT, BUT A SOCIAL TABOO -- AN UNACCEPTABLE TOPIC OF CONVERSATION. THAT IS UNDOUBTEDLY WHY IT IS SUCH AN EMOTIONAL ISSUE IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY.

SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENTS, HOWEVER, HAVE MADE IT AN ETHICAL ISSUE TOO. MEDICAL ADVANCES HAVE PUSHED EARLIER AND EARLIER THE TIME THAT A FETUS CAN SURVIVE APART FROM THE MOTHER, MEANING THAT LATE ABORTIONS CAN INVOLVE INFANTS WHO HAVE A CHANCE TO LIVE. WHERE DOES ONE DRAW THE LINE BETWEEN A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CONTROL HER OWN BODY, AND A CHILD'S RIGHT TO LIFE? GENERALLY SPEAKING, CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL GROUPS OPPOSE LEGALIZED ABORTION AND LIBERAL GROUPS SUPPORT IT, BUT THE LARGER ETHICAL QUESTION HAS CLOUDED THE LINEUP SOMEWHAT.

NONETHELESS, FOR THREE YEARS NOW ABORTION HAS BEEN A LEGAL OPERATION IN THE UNITED STATES, AND IN THREE YEARS, AS A RESULT OF THAT LAW, THERE HAVE BEEN ALMOST THREE MILLION LEGAL ABORTIONS. ON THIS, THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE LANDMARK SUPREME COURT DECISION, IT APPEARS THAT ALTHOUGH THE ISSUE IS STILL HIGHLY DEBATABLE, THE LAW IS NOT.
GH/PBM